



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS TO THE YOUNG MEN OF TODAY

PRESIDENT RUSH RHEES, LL.D.
University of Rochester, Rochester, N.Y.

I

“The stone which the builders rejected the same was made the head of the corner” (Mark 12:10). The first lesson in the message of Jesus to our day is an object-lesson. The politicians of Jesus’ day found him a dangerous disturber of established order. The ardent zealots found him a quiet advocate of natural development in the growth of a kingdom of righteousness. The orthodox teachers condemned him as heretical. The devotees of religious regularity turned aside from the Friend of publicans and sinners. And yet a century had not passed before this disturber, this quietist, this heretic, this contemner of tradition and custom, had gradually risen above all the influences which opposed and despised him into the place of supreme leadership and masterhood over men. Jesus cannot be classified simply as a historic character. From the first Easter Day until these latest times he has been a presence rather than a holy voice long since silenced. Withdrawn from the sight and hearing of man, he has maintained throughout the centuries a spiritual captaincy which multitudes acknowledge who find the formulas of theology a hopeless tangle or an archaic battle of phrases. The greatest leaders of men have owned themselves outdone by this Galilean. Crowns and thrones have perished, kingdoms have risen and waned. But Jesus is still the highest attainment our humanity has made. He is the perennial challenge to young men to behold and see what highest manhood means, what assured success is like.

II

The perfect obedience to his Father’s will, the unquestioning trust, the ethical piety, the other-worldliness, which characterized the religion which Jesus lived, give resonance, and richness, and

far-reaching power to the words which expressed his direct message to man. Down the centuries those words ring, sounding from the height on which his acknowledged pre-eminence has placed him, with ever richer and more insistent imperative. Yet still the imperative rests, as it did of old, on the authority of simple ethical and religious self-evidence. In the warning against Mammon worship and anxiety concerning material things, he taught his Galilean hearers: "Seek ye chiefly God's kingdom and his righteousness." Oftentimes since, as in his own day, men have sought to identify their own insistent desires and hopes and ambitions with that supreme object of man's seeking—God's kingdom. Zealots dreamed of triumph over Rome. Visionaries thought on a world-cataclysm, and fulfilled ambitions. Churchmen have time and again identified that kingdom with their special ecclesiastical organization. And today many restless spirits, yearning for social betterment, hear the Master's word and think of this or that utopian scheme.

But the message of Jesus is other than any of these misapprehensions of it, though it is addressed to the very heart of each of these ardent desires. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (Luke 17:20). It is the result of a quiet working of leaven in life's lump. What that leaven is Jesus' own life most clearly showed—the leaven of simple, perfect obedience, of supreme and controlling regard for that in our human life which shows that we are children of God, who is Spirit.

Today, as never before, the things seen and temporal are asserting their claim to man's supreme regard. They are more astounding in their range and the promise they give of power and enjoyment than ever before. They are claiming the attention of men's serious philosophic and scientific curiosity as never before. They are obscuring for many men the significance of those interests in life which we call spiritual, as never before. And yet the soul's hunger and thirst after righteousness was never more poignant. The quest for truth, for justice, for brotherhood makes tremendous appeal. These undercurrents of desire, high and exalting, are the evidence of the leaven in the lump. For of these desires Jesus is alike the stimulus and the satisfaction. He sought supremely

God's kingdom. His meat was to do God's will. His command simply vocalized his example. His triumphant exaltation to the highest place our manhood conceives for itself is the confession of the ages that man is a spirit, and should rule the body and the world in which he lives, bringing them under control of the will of the Eternal Spirit.

III

The doing of the will of God is extremely simple, even though it be supremely difficult. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . . and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Mark 12:30, 31). The bane of religion is tradition and crystallized ceremony. So Jesus found it. So all ages find it. This message of Jesus was not new. He read it in the Law. But it needed the new affirmation which he gave it. To the youth of our day there is something deeply satisfying in the rich social character of these commands. They assure him that the quest of the spiritual kingdom will not call him afar from the world and its need. The parable of the Samaritan is the clear anchor which holds the follower of Jesus in the world, there to work out—as Jesus did—his loving obedience to God, and his loving service of his fellows.

Here also, not the word alone, but supremely the word as the echo of the everyday walk and conversation of Nazareth's great Carpenter, brings his message to the eager, earnest, reality-loving youth of today.

IV

Toward the end of his public ministry, as hostility began to be more pronounced, and the disciples were perplexed about many things, Jesus repeatedly said to them, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20, cf. Mark 11:23). No one of those who heard dreamed of giving literal meaning to the removal of mountains. The mountains of human opposition, misunderstanding, and hatred presented hindrances far more serious than any mass of earth and rock. It was in face of such spiritual

difficulties that Jesus said, "If ye have faith . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you."

This faith of which he spoke when troubles gathered thickest about him was and is also the message of his life to men of today and all days. It was with him the simple corollary of perfect obedience. In the great temptation he declined either to test God or to distrust him. Throughout his life he took the path of love to God and love to man in place of all misunderstanding of men who could not adjust themselves to so simple and so exacting a standard. And although the path led to a cross, he followed it, to find that cross the opportunity for supreme obedience, supreme love to men, and supreme exaltation. It proved not an obstacle, but an opportunity. "Therefore also God highly exalted him" (Phil. 2:9).

Every disciple of Jesus needs like faith, though no like obstacle stands across his path. The young man of today needs such faith, for the whole clamor of our money-getting, pleasure-craving life cries out upon the spirit's quest of obedience to the searching, simple law of love to God and brotherhood to man. But Jesus' word, echoed with a thousand reverberations from his triumphant life, declares that such obedience is possible and is good. It needs but faith.

If faith is the corollary as well as the prerequisite of the perfect obedience, the first corollary of faith is patience. Not patience with evil, but with the time God's work must take if it is to penetrate life to its roots and establish his kingdom in its triumph. Jesus' word "It is finished" is the highest utterance of faith and trust, for it committed to the future and God's good time the work for which he gave his life—not in resignation, but in confidence. "He saw of the travail of his soul, and was satisfied" (Isa. 53:11).

V

The simplicity and the strong ethical directness of Jesus necessitate good heed by us all to a final word in his message: "By their fruits ye shall know them . . . not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:16, 21). Faith,

loyal and patient; love to God and to neighbor; supreme seeking of God's kingdom: these are as leaves on a barren tree, except as godly conduct proves them to be living realities.

This ultimate appeal to conduct is Jesus' strongest appeal to a generation intent upon reality: even as it is his merciless rebuke for religion that expends itself in pious feelings and performances. This ultimate appeal to conduct is also Jesus' strongest appeal to the spiritual life which he awakens within us, for godly conduct is that life's fruitage; its root lies there; all its springs are in God.

The finality of conduct, the power of faith, the simplicity of duty, the supremacy of the concerns of the spirit, these are the chief messages of Jesus to young men today. And they are made concrete and definite now, as they were for Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom near Capernaum, by the Master's all-inclusive summons: "Follow me."